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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000409

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: A PRIMER ON TAIWAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PROCESS

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Approximately 13.5 million voters are expected to cast ballots either for the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou or for the DPP's Frank Hsieh in Taiwan's presidential election on Saturday, March 22. Unless the election is extremely close or contested, the winner should be clear by 8 or 9 p.m. Most of AIT's contacts expect Ma Ying-jeou to win, though Frank Hsieh is fighting to score a come-from-behind upset victory. Two UN referenda are also on the ballot; our contacts predict that neither will meet the high participation threshold (50 percent of all eligible voters) required to validate a referendum. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Taiwan's voters head to the polls Saturday, March 22, to elect their next president, who will serve a four-year term after inauguration on May 20. Two tickets are competing in the election: the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) Frank Hsieh (Chang-ting) and VP candidate Su Tseng-chang versus the opposition Kuomintang's (KMT) Ma

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Ying-jeou and his running mate Vincent Siew (Wan-chang). The 14,401 polling stations throughout Taiwan and the offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu will open at 8 a.m. and close at 4 p.m. After the polls close, election workers at each polling station will count the paper ballots, and then forward the results through Central Election Commission (CEC) offices to the CEC's election center in Taipei, which will display a running tally of the official results as they come during the late afternoon and evening.

¶3. (SBU) Taiwan's TV news stations will also compile and display their own running tallies of election returns, which come in much faster than the official CEC count, though such numbers are not always completely accurate. Unless the election is extremely close or contested, who the winner is will be clear by 8 or 9 in the evening on election day. Taiwan has long experience with elections, which are quite orderly, with both voters and election workers understanding the drill. Incidents at polling stations or problems with the election process have tended to be unusual and minor. In the early evening, supporters will gather outside the candidates' headquarters, and once the results are in, both winning and losing candidates will address their supporters.

14. (C) There are 17.3 million people eligible to vote in the presidential election, and the expected turnout rate is about 78 percent or 13.5 million votes. If there are storms in northern Taiwan, as currently predicted, that could slightly depress the turnout rate in the north. If the turnout rate is 78 percent, the victorious candidate will need to win more than 6.8 million votes.

15. (C) The expectation here is widespread that Ma Ying-jeou will win the election, although pollsters and other experts differ over the size of Ma's lead. In addition to post-2005 election trends, key reasons for this expectation include a perception that many people want their government to focus on improving the economy, the central plank of the KMT's program, and they desire a change because they are fed up with the Chen administration. However, the Hsieh campaign has also gained some resonance with its central theme that the DPP can better protect Taiwan's interests against pressure from China. Most contacts doubt, but do not entirely discount, the possibility of a Hsieh upset victory. Having lost previous elections that it expected to win, the KMT even at this date remains obsessed that a possible last-minute "dirty trick" by the DPP could affect tomorrow's results.

16. (C) If the KMT wins on Saturday, the reaction by the DPP and its supporters will probably be subdued since the results will not come as a major surprise. Frank Hsieh, who has said he would withdraw from politics if he loses, would step down as acting party chairman on election night. If the DPP loses, the magnitude of the loss will have a bearing on morale and party plans for the future. Winning over 40 percent of the vote would probably be viewed as a credible performance by Hsieh, while a showing under 40 percent could

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raise concerns over whether base support for the DPP may be eroding. A Hsieh victory would come as a big shock to the KMT and its supporters, who would find the results difficult to believe or accept. (Note: There is likely to be an emotional search for "scapegoats," should this happen.) Nonetheless, the KMT, which enjoys a 3/4 majority in the LY, will not want to see a repeat of the damaging demonstrations that followed its losses in 2000 and 2004.

17. (C) In addition to the presidential election, voters will also have the option of casting ballots on either or both of two referenda, one sponsored by the DPP on joining the UN under the name "Taiwan" and the other sponsored by the KMT on returning to the UN under the ROC or a flexible name. Election workers will tally referendum ballots immediately after completing the count of presidential votes, and these results will also become available during the evening on Saturday. For a referendum to be valid, 50 percent of all eligible voters must participate, i.e., about 8.7 million voters. AIT's contacts do not expect either referendum to meet the 50 percent participation threshold, one pollster predicting that the participation rate will be under 40 percent for both referenda. Most KMT supporters will probably not participate in either referendum.
YOUNG